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ABSTRACT

The study examined the hypothesis that Mexican Americans in south Texas were not holders of certain county offices in proportion to their population in the selected counties, utilizing adjusted population counts (i.e., persons aged 18 years and over or those who were potential voters and/or officeholders). Twenty-eight counties were chosen on the basis that they were situated in south Texas and had at least 40 percent Mexican American constituency. The offices consisted of county judge, attorney, auditor, clerk, treasurer, assessor, sheriff, commissioners, and justice of the peace. These offices were usually filled by election. Between September and December 1975, a short questionnaire was mailed to county clerks, requesting information on: names of officeholders, whether the office was elective or appointive, and ethnicity and sex of officeholder. After the first mailing or the follow-up, responses were obtained from all but two counties. Data were obtained from the "Texas Almanac" and chambers of commerce for the remaining two. Some findings were: on a county-by-county basis, Mexican Americans were underrepresented in 20 of the 28 counties--in 9 of the 20 counties, Mexican Americans held more than 50 percent of the offices; and the post of auditor was the only one not predominantly elective and the one in which Mexican Americans held the lowest number of positions. (NQ)

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A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS IN COUNTY OFFICES OF SOUTH TEXAS

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by

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Paper presented at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association, Dallas, Texas, 7-10 April 1976.

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INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis of this study is that Mexican-Americans are not holders of certain county offices in South Texas proportionate to their numbers in the population of the selected counties utilizing adjusted population counts (i.e., persons aged eighteeen and over, or those who are potentially voters and/or officeholders). The counties were chosen on these bases: 1) being situated in south Texas and, 2) having at least 40 percent Mexican-American constituency per the 1970 United States census, utilizing total populations.[1]

Thus, there were 28 counties in all coinciding very well with the usual designation of "south Texas"; the northern and northeastern boundaries consisted inclusively, of Kinney, Uvalde, Medina, Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, Live Oak, and San Patricio counties. No counties between these and the Mexican border were omitted under the 40% criterion.

The offices included were those usually filled by election and consisted of county judge, county attorney, auditor, county clerk, treasurer, assessor, sheriff, commissioners and justice of the peace. Generally, the writer made no attempt to assess relative influence of the offices, reserving this as one aspect of a possible future, more comprehensive study.[2]

The data were gathered between September and December, 1975 with a minimum of help from five graduate students (each one gathering from one county each). A very short questionnaire was

utilized, requesting information on names of officeholders whether the office was elective or appointive, ethnicity and sex of officeholder. The researcher made no attempt at this juncture to seek information on other aspects, rather proposed to make a brief survey of the selected field in order to assess the utility of further study. (See appendix for questionnaire).

The questionnaires were mailed to respective county clerks, with the exception of the five by graduate students which were taken in person. Responses were obtained from all but two county clerks offices after first mailing or follow-up. Resort was made to the Texas Almanac[3] and chambers of commerce for the remaining two.

BACKGROUND

In general the Mexican-American has suffered a deprived position in the five southwestern states since they came under the domination of the United States, a condition that has existed to a greater or lesser degree up to the present.[4] Two interesting exceptions, when the reference is made to the political arena, should be noted. First, the Mexican-Americans of New Mexico (Nuevo Mexicans or Manitos) have had a long history of political participation and decision-making because of their unique historical development.[5] Certain state offices traditionally were reserved for Manitos, and where Manitos were over 50% of the population in counties, they usually controlled local offices.

The second exception was the so called sub-state regional potence of Mexican-American dominance in four "native counties"

until 1952 in Colorado, in which the Mexican-Americans controlled the local county governments and determined who should represent them in the state legislature.[6] Otherwise, while holding some local, state, or national offices, the Mexican-American has not been politically visible, except as his vote was sought.[7]

But recent decades have been periods of protest over seeming helplessness and relative deprivation amongst various minority groups. Blacks should probably be given the credit for beginning the revolt against position. They have made some notable progress,[8] though remaining still proportionately under-represented in offices at various levels throughout the land.

Mexican-Americans have become gradually more politically aware and/or participatory, according to one writer, moving through four phases of resistance, accomodation, social change and protest (1965-1972).[9] They have had some success in recent years at the local level as in Crystal City, Texas, and Stockton, California,[10] as well as in higher offices. As to the latter, Lemus provided an interesting study of Spanish-surname officeholders in the United States including local and state offices.[11] One must note the problem of use of Spanish-surname; however, in the five southwestern states, a great number of such persons presumably Mexican-Americans, were included. A second deficiency in attempting to use his list for assessment of proportionality is that, as just a listing of Spanish-surname officeholders (which was his purpose), one does not know how many non-Spanish-surname persons filled offices.

FINDINGS

Table 1 indicates that from county to county, in south Texas there is a variation in the proportions of Anglos, Mexican-Americans and Black-Americans, for adjusted populations (and herein after the word population shall mean adjusted population unless otherwise designated). Anglos apparently vary from a low of 3.1% to 68.7% in the various counties, Mexican-Americans from 30.9% to 96.9%, while the Blacks ranged from 0.0 to 6.8%. In total, as to percentages of the respective groups, there were Anglos 46.4, Mexican-Americans 49.4 and Blacks 4.2. Other ethnics were practically nil. The total population was a little over a million.

Table 2 reveals that most officeholders were elected, most appointments would seemingly be due to deaths or resignations of elected persons. Also, Anglos held 251 of the selected offices, while 183 were held by Mexican-Americans. No Blacks held any of these offices-they were truly underrepresented. Further, of the officeholders, 385, or 88.7% were males, leaving only 49, or 11.3% of the offices to females. In Table 3, one may see the specific office in terms of election or appointment, ethnicity and sex. The post of auditor is the only one not predominantly elective and is also that one in which Mexican-Americans hold the lowest number of positions, possibly due to connections with educational backgrounds, for even where Mexican-Americans control the local government, auditors tend to be Anglo. Regardless for all offices, Anglos hold the greater

number in south Texas as a whole. Females nowhere hold dominance, but come closest to equality in the office only of county clerk.

Table 4 is the most significant picturization for the hypothesis of this preliminary study. For it reveals seemingly overwhelmingly Anglo dominance, by counties, and in many instances where Mexican-Americans outnumber them. In only 9 of the 28 counties do the latter hold more than 50% of the offices. In 2 counties, they share equally with Anglos even though outnumbering them. In five counties there were no Mexican-American office-holders even though they constituted 30.9 to 56.5% of the respective populations. In only one instance, Jim Hogg county, was the Anglo excluded, and here he constituted only 8.0% of the population.

Another view reveals Anglos sharing offices equally or dominating, though the minority in population statistics, in 10 of the 28 counties. Clearly the Anglos dominated in 17 counties of the 28, regardless of population proportion.

In considering the 28 counties as a whole, it may be perceived, via Table 4, that Anglos constituted 46.4% of the population, but held 57.8% of the offices. On the other hand, Mexican-Americans, constituted a larger proportion of the population, or 49.4%, while holding only 42.2% of the offices. On the basis of a Z test for computing proportions[12], we conclude that the Mexican-Americans of South Texas are underrepresented at the county office level. The test provided a statistic of 4.04, significant at the .001 level. The finding probably leads to little surprise amongst those knowledgeable about the history of the area; but it does provide graphic statistics.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Mexican-Americans as well as other minorities including Blacks have begun to become more politically aware and active in recent decades. In all probability they have not attained equality proportionate to their numbers, though having had some notable, even if exceptional, successes, such as Mexican-Americans in New Mexico and in portions of Colorado.

In the present study, the hypothesis was that Mexican-Americans were underrepresented at the specific level of county offices in the 28 contiguous south Texas counties, selected upon the basis of having at least 40% of the total population Mexican-Americans. The hypothesis was upheld by the data which revealed through testing, that the misproportionality could have been incorrectly derived at a rate of less than one out of thousand times.

Even on a county-by-county basis, the Mexican-Americans were underrepresented in 20 counties of the 28 surveyed. In only 9 of the 20 did they have more than 50% of the offices (note that they may have held more offices than Anglos in some counties and still have been disproportionality underrepresented).

In every single office of the nine different offices, treating the counties as a whole, Mexican-American were under-represented.

While the focus of the study was upon Mexican-Americans, it should be observed that Blacks, who constituted about 4.2% of the population of the 28 counties, were totally without

representation. Females also were disproportionality under-represented, comprising only 11.3% of officeholders though roughly half of the population.

Why these disproportionalities? One cannot conclude from the collected data as to why this is so, though having some historical background one may posit developments over time that have included discrimination and prejudice. Yet at the same time, one cannot project as to whether the present findings indicate more or less such discrimination or prejudice, nor the nature or origin of them. Thus, it would seem wise to conduct a larger study to answer such questions as these:

1. Is officeholding declining or increasing amongst Mexican-Americans? The researcher suspects it is increasing, but suggests a longitudinal study involving records of say, ten year periods, moving back into history, would provide an idea of trends.

2. Why is there such underrepresentation? The writer expected there would be, but also suggests the longitudinal study would include an attempt at studying records of attitudes in the population, as well as any overt or covert activities restricting access to offices by dominant interests.

3. What has been the relationship of registration to vote and actual voting among Mexican-Americans and Anglos to proportions of officeholders over the years?

4. Cross-tabulations by socio-economic levels and educational achievement might be helpful, though one may suspect that

these would not be linked causally but consequentially to other cultural historical developments.

5. Longitudical-historical study of the regional sub-cultures might provide some clues, also, to male dominance and Black underrepresentation.

6. Study of other levels of officeholding, as city and state, re this region of Texas, could be of value and interest. It may be that representation there may be more equitable, but this fact remains to be established.

7. Study of specific county offices may reveal a relationship of relative power to ethnicity.

In conclusion, the proposal hypothesis of underrepresentation of Mexican-Americans in county office holdings in the 28 south Texas counties, not surprisingly, was borne out. Hence the present study provide a more factual basis for the preceding belief.

Table 1

Ethnicity by adjusted Population statistics and Percentages for Selected South Texas Counties

County	Anglo by Population and %	Mexican-American by Population and %	Black by Population and %	Total Population 18 Years & Over
Atascosa	6,335/55.0	5,087/44.2	95/0.8	11,517
Bexar	272,704/53.5	202,119/39.7	34,649/6.8	509,472
Brooks	1,086/23.2	3,592/76.6	10/0.2	4,688
Cameron	23,712/29.9	55,148/69.6	379/0.4	79,239
Dimmith	1,117/22.3	3,872/77.3	23/0.4	5,012
Duval	1,250/17.8	5,781/82.1	11/0.1	7,042
Frio	2,392/37.5	3,947/61.9	38/0.6	6,377
Hidalgo	27,558/27.3	73,325/72.5	227/0.2	101,110
Jim Hogg	228/ 8.0	2,613/91.8	6/0.2	2,847
Jim Wells	7,754/40.0	11,486/59.0	176/1.0	19,416
Karnes	5,286/63.3	2,823/33.8	236/2.8	8,345
Kenedy	49/12.5	343/87.5	0/0	392
Kinney	319/26.4	824/68.4	61/5.1	1,204
Kleberg	12,400/56.9	8,525/39.1	882/4.0	21,807
La Salle	800/27.1	2,146/72.7	6/0.2	2,952
Live Oak	2,984/68.7	1,345/30.9	13/0.3	4,342
Mc Mullen	304/43.5	395/56.5	0/0	699
Maverick	1,462/15.1	8,229/84.9	4/--	9,695
Medina	6,935/56.1	5,359/43.3	77/0.6	12,371
Nueces	81,680/57.3	54,323/38.1	6,619/4.6	142,622
San Patricio	15,331/56.6	11,334/41.8	424/1.6	27,089
Starr	301/ 3.1	9,476/96.9	2/--	9,779
Uvalde	6,172/57.5	4,482/41.8	81/0.7	10,735

Table 1 Continued

County	Anglo by Population and %	Mexican-American by Population and %	Black by Population and %	Total Population 18 Years & Over
Webb	7,386/17.8	33,939/81.7	232/0.5	41,557
Willacy	2,593/30.1	5,987/69.6	26/0.3	8,606
Wilson	5,134/62.9	2,940/36.0	92/1.1	8,166
Zapata	349/12.9	2,351/87.1	0/0	2,700
Zavala	1,304/21.1	4,860/78.6	19/0.3	6,183
TOTALS	494,925/46.4	526,651/49.4	44,388/4.2	1,065,964

Source: 1970 Census of Population, U. S. Department of Commerce, Vol 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 45, Texas, Section1, pp. 273-336, 1086-1100

Table 2

Tabulations and %, Selected Factors, County Officeholders

County	Method of Getting Office		Ethnicity		Sex		Representation of Mex-Americans Over: (O) Under: (U)
	Elected	Appointed	Anglo	Mex. Am.	Male	Female	
Atascosa	16/84.2	3/15.8	19/100	0/0	18/94.7	1/53	U
Bexar	16/100	0/0	12/75.0	4/25.0	16/100	0/0	U
Brooks	16/100	0/0	1/6.25	15/93.75	14/87.5	2/12.5	O
Cameron	19/95	1/5	10/50	10/50	20/100	0/0	U
Dimmitt	12/85.7	2/14.3	7/50	7/50	12/85.7	2/14.3	U
Duval	10/66.6	5/33.3	3/20.0	12/80.0	14/93.3	1/ 6.6	U
Frio	11/84.6	2/15.4	11/84.6	2/15.4	11/84.6	2/15.4	U
Hidalgo	20/95.2	1/ 4.8	5/23.8	16/76.2	18/85.7	3/14.3	O
Jim Hogg	14/93.33	1/ 6.66	0/0	15/100	14/93.33	1/ 6.66	O
Jim Wells	17/100	0/0	9/52.9	8/47.1	16/94.1	1/ 5.9	U
Karnes	13/86.6	2/13.3	15/100	0/0	11/73.3	4/26.6	U
Kenedy	12/80.0	3/20.0	13/86.6	2/13.3	12/80.0	4/20.0	U
Kinney	13/100	0/0	10/76.9	3/23.1	11/84.6	2/15.4	U
Kleberg	15/100	0/0	13/86.6	2/13.3	12/80.0	3/20.0	U
La Salle	14/100	0/0	9/64.3	5/35.7	12/85.7	2/14.3	U
Live Oak	15/93.7	1/ 6.3	16/100	0/0	15/93.7	1/ 6.3	U
Mc Mullen	9/90.0	1/10.0	10/100	0/0	7/70.0	3/30.0	U
Maverick	14/93.3	1/ 6.6	1/ 6.6	14/93.3	15/100	0/0	O
Medina	14/93.3	1/ 6.6	15/100	0/0	14/93.3	1/ 6.6	U
Nueces	19/95.0	1/ 5.0	19/95.0	1/ 5.0	19/95.0	1/ 5.0	U
San Patricio	18/100	0/0	16/88.9	2/11.1	17/94.4	1/ 5.6	U
Starr	15/93.25	1/ 6.25	1/ 6.25	15/93.25	15/93.25	1/ 6.25	U
Uvalde	13/92.9	1/ 7.1	13/92.9	1/ 7.1	11/78.6	3/21.4	U
Webb	14/93.3	1/ 6.66	2/13.3	13/86.6	14/93.3	1/ 6.6	O
Willacy	16.94.1	1/ 5.9	10/58.8	7/41.2	14/82.3	3/17.6	U
Wilson	13/92.8	1/ 7.1	10/71.4	4/28.5	11/78.6	3/21.4	U
Zapata	14/100	0/0	1/ 7.1	13/92.9	13/92.9	1/ 7.1	O
Zavala	12/85.7	2/14.3	1/ 7.1	13/92.9	8/57.1	6/42.9	O
TOTALS	399/91.9	35/ 8.1	251/57.8	183/42.2	385/88.7	49/11.3	

Table 3

County Offices of Twenty-eight South Texas County by Method of Selection, Ethnicity, Sex by Numbers and Percent

	How Selected						
	Elected	Appointed	Anglo	Mex-Am.	Male	Female	Total
County Judge	26/ 92.9	2/ 7.1	18/64.3	10/35.7	28/100	0/0	28
County Attorney	24/ 92.3	2/ 7.7	19/73.1	7/26.9	25/96.2	1/ 3.8	26
Auditor	4/ 17.4	19/82.6	19/82.6	4/17.4	20/87.0	3/13.0	23
Clerk	27/ 96.4	1/ 3.6	15/53.6	13/46.4	15/53.6	13/46.4	28
Treasurer	28/100.0	0/0	17/60.7	11/39.3	17/60.7	11/39.3	28
Assessor	27/ 96.4	1/ 3.5	17/60.7	11/39.3	20/71.4	8/28.6	28
Sheriff	27/ 96.4	1/ 3.5	17/60.7	11/39.3	28/100	0/0	28
Commissioners	106/ 94.6	6/ 5.4	60/53.6	52/46.4	109/97.3	3/ 2.7	112
Justices of Peace	130/ 97.7	3/ 2.3	69/51.9	64/48.1	123/92.5	10/ 7.5	133
TOTALS/%	399/ 91.9	35/ 8.1	251/57.8	183/42.2	385/88.7	49/11.3	434

Adjusted Population %	Anglo	Mex-American
	48.45	51.55

Table 4

Comparison djusted Populations and Officeholders by Percentages for Selected south Texas Counties

	Anglo		Mexican-American	
	Population	Offices	Population	Offices
Atascosa	55.0	100.0	44.2	0.0
Bexar	53.5	75.0	39.7	25.0
Brooks	*23.2	6.25	76.6	93.75
Cameron	29.9	50.0	69.6	50.0
Dimmitt	22.3	50.0	77.3	50.0
Duval	17.8	20.0	82.1	80.0
Frio	37.5	84.6	61.9	15.4
Hidalgo	*27.3	23.8	72.5	76.2
Jim Hogg	* 8.0	0.0	91.8	100.0
Jim Wells	40.0	52.9	59.0	47.1
Karnes	63.3	100.0	33.8	0.0
Kenedy	12.5	86.6	87.5	13.3
Kinney	26.4	76.9	68.4	23.1
Kleberg	56.9	86.6	39.1	13.3
La Salle	27.1	64.3	72.7	35.7
Live Oak	68.7	100.0	30.9	0.0
Mc Mullen	43.5	100.0	56.5	0.0
Maverick	*15.1	6.6	84.9	93.3
Medina	56.1	100.0	43.3	0.0
Nueces	57.3	95.0	38.1	5.0
San Patricio	56.6	88.9	41.8	11.1
Starr	* 3.1	6.3	96.9	93.25
Uvalde	57.5	92.9	41.8	7.1
Webb	*17.8	13.3	81.7	86.6
Willacy	30.1	58.8	69.6	41.2
Wilson	62.9	71.4	36.0	28.5
Zapata	*12.9	7.1	87.1	92.9
Zavala	*21.1	7.1	78.6	92.9
AVERAGE FOR 28 SO. TEX COUNTIES	46.4	57.8	49.4	42.2

*Counties in which Mexican-Americans hold more than 50% of the offices

FOOTNOTES

1. Poverty in Texas, Report by the office of Economic Opportunity, Texas Department of Community Affairs, Austin, Texas, May, 1974, p. 180.

2. These are usually elective offices and those likely to be included in telephone directories.

3. The Texas Almanac, A. H. Belo Corporation, 1975, pp. 566-78.

4. See such sources as Manual P. Servin, An Awakened Minority: The Mexican-Americans, Second Edition, Glancoe, Beverly Hills, 1974; Nathaniel N. Wagner and Marsha J. Haug, Chicanos: Social and Psychological Respectives, The C.V. Mosby Company, St. Louis, 1971. (See selected chapters); George Eaton Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, 4th Ed., Harper and Row, New York, 1972, (see Index of subjects).

5. Flaviano Chris Garcia, "Manitos and Chicanos in Nuevo Mexico Politics," Aztlan 5, nos. 1 and 2, Spring and Fall, 1974, pp. 177-86.

6. Fernando V. Padilla and Carlos B. Ramirez, "Patterns of Chicano Representation in California, Colorado and New Mexico," Aztlan, op. cit., pp. 189-34.

7. "Meg 4 Evet?," Newsweek 80:38+, October 23, 1972.

8. Robert Curvin, "Black Power in City Hall, " Society, 9:55-8, September, 1972; "Hancock County," The New Republic, 164:8-9, March 26, 1971; "Black (Political) Power," The New Republic 169:10, September 29, 1973; Alex Poinsett, "Black Takeover of the Cities," Ebony 26:76-79+, November, 1970; Carlyle C. Douglas, "Black Politics in the New South," Ebony, op. cit., 27-30+, January, 1971.

9. Armando, Navarro, "The Evolution of Chicano Politics," Aztlan, op. cit., 57-84.

10. John Staples Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1974; Anne Lottis, "How They Outsmarted the Anglos," The Nation 216:562-4, April 30, 1973.

11. Frank C. Lemus, "National Roster of Spanish Surname Elected Officials, 1973," Aztlan, op. cit., 313-410.

12. Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., Social Statistics, 2nd Edition, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1972, 193-8.

QUESTIONNAIRE: OFFICEHOLDERS IN SELECTED COUNTIES OF SOUTH TEXAS

(Please complete the following data for the selected offices in your county)

Selected Office (County only)	Name of Officeholder	Usually elected or appointed? (Check one)		Ethnic Background (Check one)				Sex (Check One)	
		Elected	Appointed	Anglo	Black	Mexican-American	Other	Male	Female
County Judge									
County Attorney									
Auditor									
Clerk									
Treasurer									
Assessor									
Sheriff									
Commissioner									
Commissioner									
Commissioner									
Commissioner									
Justice of Peace									
Justice of Peace									
Justice of Peace									
Justice of Peace									